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ABSTRACT

At Kirkwood Community College (KCC), student paraprofessionals are used in a variety of ways. They are employed in the Learning Resources Center; in the production of graphic materials; in microwave, instructional fixed service, and cable broadcasting; in dial-access videotape distribution; and in television control rooms. In addition, KCC engages students in clerical and secretarial positions; in laboratory settings and hands-on technical courses; in direction instruction, as well as tutorial and peer counseling roles; and in instructional support capacities. While student help provides a viable alternative to the use of full-time professional staff in many academic situations, several problems exist. First, most student employment is financed by federal work study programs. While costing the institution less, this arrangement does not guarantee the availability of the best qualified students. Second, an economic disincentive is built into the use of student help, often resulting in long-term budget cuts that cannot be easily restored. Third, student roles must often be absorbed by full-time staff in times of economic stress. A final problem is the expense involved in training and supervising students in short-term positions. Some of these problems can be alleviated by including funds for training in budgets, allocating monies to hire students who are ineligible for work study, and increasing the availability of training and information for student employees. (Author/AYC)

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE USE OF STUDENTS IN PARAPROFESSIONAL CAPACITIES AT KIRKWOOD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the range of uses of students as paraprofessionals at Kirkwood Community College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Roles described include positions in the Learning Resources Center, in production of graphics materials, in microwave, instructional fixed service, and cable television broadcasting, in dial access videotape distribution, and televison control room positions. Student roles in clerical, secretarial, and laboratory aide positions, as well as roles in "hands-on" technical courses, tutorial and peer counseling positions are also described.

Problems in utilization of students are also described. These problems include; budget allocation, state law, collective bargaining agreements, cost of training part-time and short-term help, student employment program funding and requisite eligibility of individuals for work-study grants.

Recommendations to facilitate better use of student assistance include inclusion of funding for training, budget to hire individuals who may be ineligible under federal work-study guidelines and increased availability of training/information for student employees.

In the 1960's new community colleges were opening on an average of nearly one each week. Student enrollments were constantly growing and the public was most concerned with making sure enough classrooms would exist to meet projected need. In that environment, staff, if they could be found, could be hired. When needs arose, hiring was approved and both enrollments and staff size continued to grow.

Today, enrollments are usually stable or declining. A surplus of qualified teachers exists, and state-mandated continuing contract laws have made termination of surplus full-time staff quite difficult. Long term projections indicate a decline in most student populations and budgets are increasingly strained by the economic strictures forced by the ongoing recession. Even when needs arise therefore, it is quite difficult to obtain approval for any increase in full time staff.

Given this reluctance to hire and the probability that such reluctance will continue for a number of years, the purpose of this paper is an examination of alternatives to use of full time professional staff in many academic situations and the substitution of students in paraprofessional roles. Use of student paraprofessionals is specifically examined here rather than non-student paraprofessionals because of the cost to the institution, non-applicability of continuing contract laws, and ready availability of a large labor pool from which appropriate student paraprofessionals can be selected.

Kirkwood Community College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, is not unique in use of students in paraprofessional capacities at the post secondary level. Such roles, working beside professional staff in support capacities, have been many and varied. Probably the greatest stimulus to such utilization has been the availability of federal work-study funds to supplement college funds in such programs.

Most student labor tends to be used in custodial, clerical or secretarial capacities. Examination of the literature however, indicates several paraprofessional roles that are emerging. As early as 1969, reports were appearing on use of students as paraprofessionals in developmental programs such as reading laboraories (Anderson, 1969) or in transfer courses such as English (Roth, 1969). Use of student paraprofessionals in other programs ranging from teacher education (Lackawana Public Schools, 1970) to working with adult learners (Dowell, 1977) have also been documented. Rather than deal with any one category of utilization in depth, the purpose of this paper is to briefly examine the whole range of ways in which paraprofessionals are used in one community college.

The institution examined, Kirkwood Community College, is a comprehensive community college chartered by the State of Iowa to serve a seven county area with a total population of approximately 300,000. Student enrollment has grown steadily since 1966, when the college was chartered, to a current student population of approximately 6,500 full-time equivalent credit

students and about 50,000 annual enrollments in non-credit programs.

At Kirkwood Community College, student paraprofessionals are used in a variety of ways. These include replacement/ assistance to full time staff in support services such as the Learning Resource Center, audio-visual services, broadcast and dial-access televison and secretarial or clerical services. Student paraprofessionals are also used as laboratory technicians and as aides in testing, grading and in-class assistance to other students.

The uses made of student help in the Learning Resource Center are, in all liklihood, similar to those on college and university campuses all over the nation. Student assistants shelve books, shelf read to find misfiled books, work at the circulation desk and, assist in processing books for inclusion in the collection. In the audivisual area, student help is used in transportation and routine maintenance of audiovisual equipment.

Kirkwood is deeply involved in dial access videotapes and in broadcast televison production. Over 4,000 videotapes are available in the dial access system for student use. The college also provides technical staff and storage for the videotape library of a nearby K-12 school system which is serviced by the college on a fee basis. Answering the incoming requests, locating, loading, informing of appropriate channel, and refiling tapes when complete, are all services performed by

student workers. This system operates six days a week, during the hours the Learning Resource Center is open. All dial-access video system staff are students. Use of student assistants paid at a minimum wage rate has made the dial access videotape system cost effective.

In televison production, Kirkwood Community College has a multi-site microwave broadcast system. This gives the college two-way transmission capability with both voice and picture between the college and seven sites in other counties. Transmission also occurs via instructional fixed service televison, providing both voice and picture out, and voice only back from a number of other sites including the Iowa State Men's Reformatory. In addition the televison system functions as the origination site for two educational televison channels on the Cedar Rapids, Iowa, metropolitan area cable televison system. Negotiations for cable channels on other systems in the seven county area are now in progress. Locally originated and Public Broadcasting Service programming via these cable channels runs from 7:30 A.M. through 10:00 P.M. Present plans call for expansion of local programming into a sixth day each week. Two classrooms and one studio are frequently in simultaneous use, broadcasting live or taping materials for use with different segments of the televison audience. The college employs one full-time technician who handles all camera work, is also responsible for much of the control room operation, FCC log maintenance, and supervison of two non-student part-time

operators. The bulk of camera work is done by students with approximately one week of part time supervison/training. Students are able to function as camera operators and, under light supervison, to perform many of the control room tasks as well. Employment of additional full time staff members as camera operators or control room technicians would significantly alter the economics and therefore the feasibility of operation of the televison systems in use.

As a community college, with a broad range of business programs, Kirkwood Community College has many students receiving secretarial training. Many of the programs require an internship. When possible, interns are placed in paying positions in the business community in the college service district. Some are placed in paying positions by the college as well, to perform a broad range of clerical and secretarial tasks.

Use of student assistance in laboratory settings is also an ongoing operation. Student help to set up or break down experimental equipment, provide one-on-one assistance with specific procedures, to wash glassware or to check equipment in or out is quite standard. Such student help, available part-time and at minimum wage drastically cuts full time support staff required.

Student workers are being used in direct instruction as well as in support roles. Most notably, tutorial programs employing students as mentor/tutors and counseling programs with

students as mentor/counselor have gained wide acceptance. In addition student aides are used in some "hands-on" instructional settings such as electronics laboratories or as discussion leaders in more traditional academic courses. An important consideration here is the law. The state of Iowa, like many states, makes the state certified instructor of record for the course liable for whatever occurs in the classroom. As a result student aides responsibilities must be clearly defined and clear modes of supervison developed to prevent possible liability action.

Use of student assistance in academic/clerical roles is also increasing. Help for instructors in preparation of graphic materials such as slides or visuals, or more traditional roles such as collating handouts, entering grades or test scores, grading objective examinations or keeping attendance records can be a great help.

Unfortunately, all these academic/clerical tasks would normally be performed by an instructor already drawing a salary. Frequently when budget cuts occur these are the first positions to go because they do not notably save the institution money.

The uses for paraprofessional help cited thus far are not unique. Most institutions have the same or similar types of positions filled by student workers. What is needed is a cost-accounting system to keep track of all student help and the impact of the use of such help on the institution.

Several very real problems exist with the employment of

student help. First, the great bulk of all student employment is financed by federal work-study programs. This ties eligibility for employment to financial need. This costs the institution substantially less but it does not guarantee availability of the best qualified people. To adequately tap available student resources, the authors recommend expanded and possibly separate funding to allow hiring of student workers who are ineligible for work-study positions funded in part by the federal government.

A second problem encountered in many institutions is the economic disincentive built into the use of student help. Budgets tend to be drawn based upon past practice and anticipated growth/decline of a program. Maximizing the cost effectiveness of a program through the extensive use of student labor often results in long-term budget cuts that cannot be easily restored. Use of student paraprofessionals may well jeapordise a whole worthwhile program if that help later becomes unavailable.

An additional problem encountered is the absorption of student paraprofessional roles by full time staff in times of economic stress. The rationale is that the jobs will get done and the full time staff person is being paid anyway so why "waste" the money on paraprofessionals. As collective bargaining becomes more sophisticated, inclusion of student paraprofessional aid in exchange for larger classes or other added staff responsibilities might be considered. The authors

wish to stress that failure to appreciate the contributions that all student paraprofessionals could make at the community college level is not only an administrative problem. The problem is also deeply rooted in staff concerns for clear definition of professional roles and, in an era of stable to declining enrollment in wishes to preserve job security as well. A compromise point potentially beneficial to both the college and staff members might be found.

A last area of difficulty in the use of students as paraprofessionals in that of training and supervison. Training new staff, even part time staff, is time consuming and therefore, expensive. Since the average community college student completes less than a year at the institution, use of student help means a large investment of time is required and that the benefits are only short-term. The authors recommend both use of printed procedure manuals and that videotapes be prepared or some other mass-orientation method such as paid Sunday afternoon orientation sessions could be used to provide basic information to all student employees. Budgets should reflect cost of training as a factor in use of student paraprofessionals. Student help is used extensively. It is appreciated. The importance of such help needs to be reviewed, allowed for in budget terms and treated in the same manner we treat other essential categories of institutional employment. It has become too important to be allowed to "just happen".

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